

VZCZCXYZ0000  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHRH #1691 2241150  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 121150Z AUG 07  
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6241  
INFO RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 0688  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 8940

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 001691

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

PLEASE PASS TO EUR/RUS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/12/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [RS](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: SAUDI PRINCE BANDAR TRAVELS TO MOSCOW TO DISCUSS  
REGIONAL ISSUES, ENHANCED COOPERATION

REF: A. A) MOSCOW 03803  
[1](#)B. B) RIYADH 318

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Gfoeller  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Saudi National Security Advisor Prince Bandar bin Sultan traveled to Moscow on July 31-- the same day that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense

SIPDIS

Robert Gates were in Jeddah meeting with top SAG officials. According to Saudi and international press reports, Bandar, Russian President Putin, and Foreign Minister Lavrov discussed regional issues, specifically the Israeli-Palestinian situation, as well as bilateral relations during the three-day visit. Bandar also met with the acting Secretary of the Russian National Security Council and Deputy

SIPDIS

Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov. According to SAG sources, Bandar's trip to Russia was scheduled at the last minute, following his initial agreement to meet with Secretary Rice and Secretary Gates during their visit to the Kingdom.

[1](#)2. (C) Prince Bandar's visit to Moscow came on the heels of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' three-day trip to Russia, which included a meeting with President Putin (Ref A). Press reports of Prince Bandar's visit indicated that discussions focused on Saudi Arabia's key role in the Middle East peace process. The reports quoted Putin as saying, "The situation there is far from good," but he expressed support for the Saudis' continued influence in the region. Prince Bandar passed King Abdullah's message that he is paying the "highest level of attention" to developing political, economic, cultural, and overall strategic relations with Russia.

[1](#)3. (C) Prince Bandar's visit follows the February 2007 meeting of Russian President Putin with Saudi King Abdullah in Riyadh, which marked the first time a Russian head of state visited the Kingdom. Media and SAG officials alike hailed the visit as a success and correctly predicted that it would pave the way for increased cooperation on both the regional and bilateral fronts (Ref B). Bandar has reportedly traveled to Russia three times this year. King Abdullah last visited Moscow in 2003, as Crown Prince.

[1](#)4. (C) Arabic-language Saudi media reported widely on Prince Bandar's visit, with commentary echoing that expressed during President Putin's February visit-- namely that Saudi Arabia appeared to be publicly minimizing its dependence on the United States. It was also noted that an increase in relations between the two countries would most likely be

linked to economic cooperation and mutual interest in containing Iran's nuclear ambitions. Norwegian Charge d'Affaires Paal Bjornestad told Poloff in an August 11 meeting that the Saudi Head of the European Affairs Department at the MFA told him on August 11 that Bandar's Moscow meetings focused heavily on Iran containment issues and Lebanon, not on economic issues as some of the media suggested.

¶5. (C) Some working-level SAG contacts and Saudi internet blogs rumored that Bandar-- currently embroiled in a corruption scandal with British firm BAE-- was actually in Russia negotiating further arms deals. Although there is no publicly available evidence to substantiate these claims, Bjornestad also said that the MFA official supported this claim, commenting that "no deal was signed" with the GOR but that the sale of Russian T-90 tanks, helicopters, and missiles to the SAG was discussed. Additionally, it is interesting to note that Bandar's visit coincided with the Russian Navy's announcement to produce-- and presumably make available for sale-- new ballistic missiles designed for launch from nuclear submarines in 2008.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The Saudi-Russian relationship has increasingly developed over the past year. Although overtly linked to increasing economic and technical cooperation in the energy sector, enhancement of the Saudi-Russian bilateral relationship also sends the message that Saudi Arabia could opt to lessen its strategic reliance on the U.S., in part by beginning to purchase significant quantities of Russian weapons. Prince Bandar's trip to Moscow could also have been timed to keep him out of the spotlight during the visit of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense to Jeddah, since his name is publicly entangled with the BAE corruption scandal. Certainly it is unusual to see a senior royal cancel a meeting with senior USG officials at the last minute. END COMMENT.  
GFOELLER